



# THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR EQUITABLE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

India is the largest democratic country with 143 crores of population and the 95 crores of voters participating the biggest elections in the world. Women population in India are the half of the total population, but in all walks of life women don't have the equal opportunities and justice though they are enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Indian women had the wider experience of conducting movement in the freedom movement. After Constitution came into force women had to start their movement to secure their rights. If women could have achieved their movement then they will get equal opportunities and justice in the society, that will be an equitable democratic society. It is observed that to achieve that aim of the movement women should have followed the democratic way of fighting in which----- respecting the views of others, acting cooperatively, arriving the decisions through discussions, respecting equality, respecting the rights of others, and tolerating the views of others. This should be the attitude and perspective of the entire women movement. Recently the Indian Parliament passed the 33% of Political Reservation bill, women movement should utilize this constitutional amendment for their better life, then only they will be able to enjoy their constitutional guarantees of liberty, equality, justice, fraternity and political empowerment. Women movement will have to get the aimed equitable democratic society through Constitutional methods. We followed the Historical and analytical research methods while pursuing this paper, we invited the further research in pursuing area.

**KEYWORDS:** Democratic Society, Political Empowerment, Liberty, Justice, Equality, Fraternity

*"I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved"*

**-Dr. B.R. Ambedkar,**  
Father of Indian Constitution.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Women's Movement in India is currently a great debatable issue. Women's Movement is itself a continuous ongoing movement, which is an attempt to sketch the evaluation of the movement in India. From time to time it has been growing from one transition to another within it. It is understood that women's movement is continuously improving Movement with the involvement of multiple groups and organizations<sup>1</sup>. We will have to have discussion on women's movement i.e. the whole range of protests in which women have participated. This movement comprises of both organizations that are working for conserving women's position and some aspiring to get change in women's daily life. In India, the women's movement has been divergent understandings of patriarchal oppression and its outcomes, due to that this movement has varied strategies to combat it.

By the nature of our society and social relations, women's movement had to start in the long back, that is why this movement has been fighting for long time in India. Women's movement represents not merely and oppositional force fuelled by anger, a rather negative reaction to oppression and it develops the distinctive female culture, and positive creative

force for inspiring men and women for its very success<sup>2</sup>

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There has been a perennial flow of works, research works, books, essays, and government documents, Reports on women's issues and movement in India. As far as women's problems and prospects are concerned, there are a few notable works made by researchers, activists and authors. Among the prominent women writers Vina Mazumdar has been considered as the doyen of women writers. Her important work, i.e, Education, Equity and Development: Persistent Paradoxes in Indian Women History<sup>3</sup>, in it she traced the story that started for the women movement in India via-a-vis Indian Democracy and building of a modern nation. Sharmila Rege was one of the most prominent writers of Dalit women issues and activist, in her work, Writing :Caste/ Writing Genders Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies<sup>4</sup>, in this work she elaborated issues and challenges of Dalit women's lives. Raka Ray written a good book on women issues, her work is Fields of Protests, Women Movements in India<sup>5</sup>, in this work, how the women movement was started as a great protest against the oppression and suppression. And lastly, we discussed the women issues in the work of Datta Kusum, i.e, Women Studies and the Women Movement in India<sup>6</sup>.

Research Methodology is a way of life dedicated to discovery. Research Methodology is indispensable to human being and their society. So we followed the methodology for the sake of

understanding, identifying collection of data and to analyze it properly according to the necessity. We followed the Analytical Method to collect the facts and information, which are already available regarding the research work. We used this method to analyze the collected data and how to evaluate critically the collected data. And we followed the Comparative method to analyze the data with the developed western societies women movement because comparison will show the difference between the developed and developing.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The Women's movement had the roots in the colonial period. Preceding the national independence movement, the Western mobilized social reform movement made attempts to reform the conditions which were not conducive to women to live in the then society. Child marriage, early widowhood and Sati (The burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of the deceased Husband) were some of the inhuman practices faced by mainly the high caste Hindu women<sup>7</sup>. The reform movement was mainly spearheaded by men, who were Western liberalized educated, and considered these conditions as an indictment of their society by colonial rulers and supported the passing legislation of comfort of women, and they encouraged the women's education in a big way.

#### Waves of Women's Movement In India

Feminism consists of social, economic political and cultural movements and the concerned theories led women to think of gender inequalities and gaining awareness to get equal rights on par with men. This feminism was influenced by the Western thinking and with that it got speed and momentum in India. This movement can be referred as waves of change<sup>8</sup>. In India Feminist political movement can be viewed as waves of movement, **the first wave of women's movement in India** was the result of the social reforms taken by the Britishers in the 19th Century. The aim of the movement was to including women in public with better political rights, access to education and employment in the context of the colonial state. Raja Rama Mohan Roy had spearheaded the movement. Many organizations founded by Indians supported the social reforms<sup>9</sup>.

India got Independence in 1947 and there were many things happened to inward to resolve social issues and women's movement got the systematic development in their efforts. This systematic efforts led to have **second wave of women movement** broadened the intersectionality of caste, class and culture were recognized by the state. Mainly this wave of women movement began to enter into the private sphere of women rights including marriage, divorce, succession, Justice for dowry and sexual violence and economic opportunities<sup>10</sup>. In 1955 many bills pertaining to Hindu code were passed by the Parliament and finally in 2005, Indian parliament passed the amendment to the right to property of women.

India's Independence and the Constitution provides the social justice. Government of India also started to implement welfare schemes for better life of women. This led the Govt. to take many acts on education, employment and health of women.

This change in the Government was result of the **third wave of women's movement** which was supported by the Non-Governmental organizations in India<sup>11</sup>. The year 1991, allowed the Indian Government to implement the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization. This privatization gave an opportunity to get the technological innovations and development. This technology development brings women to get together on one platform. Today social media brings a cultural shift in women's life to have freedom, choice, and independence of women. This condition paved the way to enter into the **fourth wave of feminist movement in India**. This happened because of widespread of social media in India with the digital revolution, social media allows for the swift dissemination of knowledge and its information across borders and thus enables transnational feminist networks. It is understood that with the use of digital tools, feminists have appropriated the internet culture with the use of humor and other creative satirical formats as a mode of communication of today<sup>12</sup>

### 4. WOMEN'S STUDIES AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT:

As Dr.B.R. Ambedkar eulogizes the importance of education in the life of human beings and through which human being will get emancipation from oppression and suppression, as:

**"we may forego material benefits, but we cannot forego our right and opportunity to reap the benefits of highest education to the fullest extent .....backward classes..... Have just realized that without education their existence is not safe"**<sup>12A</sup>

The Preamble of our Constitution promises to secure to all its citizens, **Justice** social, economic and political, **Liberty** of thought, expression belief, faith and worship, **Equality** of opportunity, and to promote among them all, **Fraternity**, assuring the Dignity of the individual and unity of the nation<sup>13</sup>.

The Government of India keeps in its mind that the Constitution makers provided the safety and security to women in the Constitution, the Government knows very well, how to provide security and justice to women. The government appointed the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in September 1971 to give a report on the condition of women and to give recommendations to the progress of women. The Committee submitted its report in 1974. The committee's report known as "Towards Equality" presented a Grim picture of social reality and trends of change that sharply contrasted the goals of equality laid down by the Constitution of India. The guiding principles of Committee led the Government to provide the facilities to study about position and status of women<sup>14</sup>. On the recommendations of the Committee, the Government of India started to provide financial assistance to individuals and the Institutions to establish the study centers on women's issues. These study centers are established in the Universities and Colleges. Aims and objectives to the study centers are prepared by the Government institutions. To achieve the desired aim and objective of the women movement, women studies should possess the knowledge and wisdom as in its manifesto

**Manifesto of Women's Studies<sup>14a</sup>:**

1. Equality of women is necessary as a basic condition of social, economic and political development of the nation;
2. Improvement of Employment opportunities and earning power should be given the highest priority in order to release women from their dependent and unequal status;
3. Society owes a special responsibility to women as mothers, safe bearing and rearing of children, therefore, is an obligation that must be shared by the mother, father and society;
4. The contribution made by an active house wife to the management of a family should be accepted as economically and socially productive and as essential for national savings and development;
5. marriage and motherhood should not become disabilities, preventing women from fulfilling their full and proper role in the task of national building, in which society, including women themselves, must accept their due responsibilities;
6. Disabilities and inequalities, of which women are victims, cannot be removed for women only: such action must part of a total movement for the removal of all inequalities and oppressive social institutions;
7. Some special measures will be necessary to move in the direction of the goals set by the Constitution and to transform de jure equality into de facto one.

**5. AUTONOMOUS OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: ITS EFFECT**

As Lord **Buddha** said everybody is his/her own master no one can be master of others<sup>15</sup>. Indian national movement experienced about to have autonomy in its movement for swaraj. This was influenced by the liberal ideology and reforms taken in the national movement. In the post-independence India, the year 1975 saw witnessed the growth of autonomous in the women's movement, it expanded into the rural and urban India. The organizations which played an important role in the movement had a great inclination towards Feminism. The organizations had negative tinge towards formal structure and traditional leadership styles though they have no prototype to follow, they experimented with leaderless collectives with decision making by consensus listed belonging to the present phase of the Indian Women's Movement are support groups, agitational groups, grass root groups, wings of political parties, professional women's groups and research documentation centers."<sup>16</sup> Having knowledge about society women movement got autonomous. On its own now Women's Movement is going on.

It is examined that the decade from 1975 to 1985 experienced the emergence of autonomous women's movement. The year 1975 was declared as International Women's Year. Later it was extended to decade. The Indian Government appointed the committee on the Status of Women in India (CSIW) in 1971 to examine the rights and status of women.

The autonomous movements besides creating general consciousness among women, exposed the conversation of the

Judiciary as in the Madhura Rape case, by removing the bills boards and stopping shows where women have been shown or used as sex symbols. The autonomous in the women's movement have also given rise to special interest groups involved in the anti-dowry and anti-rape campaigns. More research is being carried out on subjects related to women. In the academic field women's studies became an upcoming field to be taken more seriously during the 1970s. As a result of the pressure created by the women's movements, amendments in the laws regarding rape, dowry, marriage etc. were made<sup>17</sup>. The autonomous women movement will work like a rudder which shows path to the ship.

**6. WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR UNIFORM CIVIL CODE.**

India is the multi-diversified society. In India, there are four major personal laws i.e, family laws. The laws are personal, in that they relate to the sphere to the personal relations but also in that they personal specific The specificity flows from primarily religious affiliation. The family laws are hired off from the main body of civil law, codified local customs for four major communities, Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Parsees, based on their religious perceptions. It is understood that in reality, therefore codes are a mix scriptural sanctions, heterogeneous customs and practices and most important perceptions forwarded established through the political maneuvering of powerful spokespersons from these communities<sup>18</sup>.

Personal laws define the relationship between men and women within the family and customs control and direct marriage, divorce, maintenance, guardianship of children, adoption, succession and inheritance. All four codes concern women intimately and all treat women as subordinate and dependent on male kin. The male is personal law, and women do not have equivalent to property<sup>19</sup>. In 1970s the New Women Movement attempted to revive the Uniform Civil Code, within the frame work of gender politics. But the women's rights became articulated within a state led reform agenda, reinscribing the concerns of national integrity, modernity and progress. In 1970s The Committee on Status of Women in India demanded for the making of Uniform Civil Code.

**Shah Bano Begum Case:** In 1985, Supreme Court of India delivered a secular and modern progressive judgement in the case of a divorced Muslim woman, Shah Bano Begum, who sued her husband for maintenance. Her husband argued that he followed everything required under the Muslim Shariyat. But the Court followed the section 125 of the Secular Criminal law to support Shah Bano case. By carefully following the Shariyat, Supreme Court delivered this judgment in favour of Muslim woman Shah Bano. The Muslim leaders felt that this judgment was nothing but an attack on their Personal law. They challenged the right of Court to interfere into their personal laws. Feminists, Liberals, and orthodox Hindus denounced the Muslim reaction. Court said that from Muslim personal law, courts or state would have protected oppressed Muslim women. Muslim leaders agitated against the judgment. Then the Rajiv Gandhi's government lost the Muslims' support, to retain the political support of them, Government made the Muslim

Women (Protection of Rights in Divorce), Act, 1986, along the lines demanded by Muslim leaders ignoring the voices of Muslim women and other voice of other women.

By this reaction of the government to the Supreme Court judgement, all women of all castes, religions, and Communities should have known rights of women in general and authority of the personal laws in particular. They should have obtained the support of all women of all cultures, castes and beliefs by ignoring their cultural barriers to get equal family rights in every personal law. Women of India should get knowledge and wisdom about the rights of human beings, and they get equality for them with their knowledge and wisdom.

In 2013, Government of India made the Nirbhaya Act, along lines demanded by both men and women. With their collective support government brought this law, why not men support women's rights in their families by accepting all rights to all women. All men and women should think about our nation as a multi-diversified one, we should keep this issue in our mind always to protect the rights of women and men collectively.

To protect the rights of women, Government of India made the National Commission for Women in August.1990, and it came into force in 1992 by constituting the Chair person and other Members of the Commission. This commission should be made with sharpen teeth to punish who violate the rights of women.

Our Constitution provides the Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity to all its citizens irrespective of their caste, colour, gender, and religion. So our governments Central and States should implement the provisions mentioned in Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy, then women will get equitable democratic society, which is the aim and objective of our Constitution.

## 7. WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FOR POLITICAL RESERVATIONS

Regarding the women's political career and political empowerment has finally been achieved by the passing of the 128 Constitutional Amendment Bill of the 33% of the Women Political Reservations in September 2023. With this passing of the long pending Bill women's political empowerment could be met. Now the active involvement of women is here very essential because women should fight for equal political reservations for all sections of the women population I.e, SC,ST,BC, Minority women. Today in India women are having the representation of about 10 lakhs of women representation in the Local Government. This representation should be extended to the Parliament and the State Legislatures.

### Journey of The Women 33% Reservation Bill:

Political Reservations Bill pending in Parliament, regarding women's political reservation in Parliament and state Legislatures is a long standing issue. The United Front Government in 1996 September, introduced the 33% political reservations to women in parliament and state legislatures ( 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill) in the parliament. The Bill has been sent to the joint select committee to be discussed

properly under the chairpersonship of Gita Mukherjee, the veteran member of parliament and Communist party leader. The Bill has been resubmitted in the house in 1997, it was hotly debated in 1998, but the Bill was stalled in the parliament. In 2010, the UPA Government under the leadership of Congress the bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha, but not sent to the Lok Sabha, it was a pending Bill at all. The political parties taken initiative to frame and introduce the Bill in the parliament to grab the votes of women. In fact, women did not want this bill and initiate it. The male dominated political parties wanted this bill to influence women for their vote. The government of India constituted Committee on Status of Women in September, 1971 to study the women conditions and to give recommendations for their better life. But the committee report known as **"Towards Equality-1974"** also did not want the political reservations in parliament or state legislatures, but they wanted reservations in local governments only. In this regard, Phulrehu Guha, the veteran women movement activist argued that :

**women are integral part of society. The provision of reservation, will only serve to reinforce the separate identity of women rather than promote their representation integration with the rest of society<sup>20</sup>**

Representation of women in the law making bodies is the key issue. Women should have fair representation, it can only be achieved through separate representation, guaranteed by quota. But to achieve the quota is not an easy task in Indian politics. The Other Backward Caste members of parliament have effectively mobilized the demand for a 'sub-reservation' for OBC women, but the upper caste leaders did not accept this demand. There was a proposal that OBC women can be put in the OBC dominated constituencies, the upper caste leaders hoped that the OBC men will be replaced by upper caste urban elite women. The OBC men did not accept it, then upper caste leaders proposed that the OBC women can be put in OBC women dominate constituencies, but to this proposal OBC men did not accept because the OBC men will lose their seats to their women and also their women also lose their seats. And the OBC men do not want empower women in the community over which male leaders have so far had undisputed authority.<sup>21</sup>

In this regard I would like to recommend women leaders to get rid of all social stigmas regarding caste, religious differences and accept the value of **fraternity** amongst themselves to get equal social relations. In the words of **Babasaheb B. R. Ambedkar**, annihilate the caste and remove the inhuman religious practices, and have human tendency towards achieving their goal that is equal political representation on par with men.

## 8. FEMINIST POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: CONTEMPORARY DEBATES :

Feminist political philosophy is an area of philosophy that is in part focused on understanding and critiquing the way political philosophy is usually construed – often without any attention to feminist concerns and to articulating how political theory might be constructed in a way that advances feminist concerns. Feminist political philosophy is a branch of both feminist philosophy and political philosophy, as a branch of feminist philosophy, it serves as a form of critique or a hermeneutics

of suspicion<sup>22</sup>. As a branch of political philosophy, Feminist political philosophy serves as a field for developing new ideals, practices and justification for how political institutions and practices should be organized and reconstructed.

Now in the third decade of the twenty-first century, feminist theorists are doing an extraordinary variety of work on matters political and democratic, including global ethics, human rights, disabilities studies, bio ethics, climate change and international development. For example in global ethics there is a debate over whether there are universal values of justice and freedom that should be intentionally cultivated for women in the developing world or whether cultural diversity should be prized. Feminist theorists have sought to answer this question in a number of different and compelling ways<sup>23</sup>.

In this regard, further research is invited to have a successful movement for equitable democratic society in India.

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